



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic



Skier Profile

Aubrey Youngs – Adventuring into the Unknown

For Aubrey Youngs, a 25-year-old military veteran from Newburg, Indiana, enlisting in the National Guard provided a way to explore the world. Unlike many young women her age, she was excited when she received the news that she'd be heading to the heart of a war zone.

Youngs joined the National Guard at the age of 20 and was first deployed in March 2003 to Camp Atterbury in Atterbury, Indiana. She trained for three months as a truck driver in vehicular operations and maintenance. At the thought of going to Iraq, Youngs was excited. "I was really looking forward to seeing another country and experiencing a new culture," she said. To her disappointment, though, Youngs' first mission was cancelled. After returning to school and completing just one semester, she was deployed a second time in March 2004. This time, however, Youngs got her wish and she was sent to Camp Phoenix, just outside the city of Kabul.

Upon arrival, she was reassigned from vehicular operations to maintenance and supply. Youngs worked in an Army warehouse in Kabul stocking, restocking and taking inventory of equipment. On February 8, 2005 while loading inventory onto high shelves, Youngs had a serious accident. While trying to come down from the top supply shelves, she fell 15 feet onto the concrete warehouse floor. "The next thing I remember is waking up on the concrete floor," she said. "I felt like I was in a dream. I tried to move my legs and panicked when I realized I couldn't. After that, I blacked out again and didn't wake up until eleven days later." While Youngs was unconscious, she was first taken to Landstuhl, Germany and then flown to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C. Her spinal cord injuries were so severe they rendered Youngs a paraplegic.

After finally regaining consciousness, Youngs' next few weeks were filled with surgeries and trips to the intensive care unit. Eventually, doctors fused two long rods into her back. A month later, she was flown to the VA Medical Center in St. Louis, and was admitted to the spinal cord unit there. "I was excited to be closer to home," said Youngs. "When I arrived at the hospital, I was treated like a celebrity because I was the only female inpatient and the nurses loved me."

She spent the next few months in rehabilitation. "Rehab was really rough for me," she said. "I had always been extremely independent and learning to rely on others so much frustrated me. Also, I had a head injury and often went into vertigo during sessions." In November 2005, Youngs finally returned home to Indiana. "I was very excited to finally be home. I was also pretty nervous. I didn't have as many people around me who knew what to do with me in a wheelchair."

Youngs now attends DeVry University where she is earning a degree in game and simulation programming. Since her accident, Youngs has become quite active – she competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska last year and now, this April, she'll take to the slopes for the second time to ski at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. "I had a great time skiing last year, but this year I hope to focus more on control and hope that I might be able to ski with one instructor instead of two," she said. "Mostly, I am just looking forward to the snow, the slopes and the fresh air. I truly think that being a part of an event like the Clinic can help take away some of the self-pity newly injured veterans sometimes feel."

Miracles on a Mountainside!

